

May 11, 2006

**THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH'S AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE IN NUTRITION CARE PRACTICE**

1. PURPOSE: This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Notice establishes the annual Under Secretary for Health's Award for Excellence in Nutrition Care Practice.

2. BACKGROUND: The services provided by VHA dietitians can have a significant impact on the comprehensiveness and quality of patient care. Within VHA, dietitians work collaboratively with interdisciplinary treatment teams to ensure that the nutritional needs of patients are met. Dietitians serve as management team members providing leadership and guidance to ensure quality nutrition and food services are provided for the veterans served. This award recognizes those VHA dietitians whose work has had a significant impact on the provision of patient care services. This award may be issued to any VHA dietitian in an administrative, management, or clinical position, at a General Schedule (GS)-11 through GS-14 level, and employed in a full-time capacity. *NOTE: A VHA dietitian receives this award only once.*

3. CRITERIA: The recipient must have demonstrated excellence in at least five of the eight following criteria, which are based on the High Performance Development Model's Eight Core Competencies.

a. **Personal Mastery.** The nominee must possess knowledge of dietetic practice through continuously pursuing professional education and study, e.g., obtaining an advanced degree or specialty certification, or attending and/or providing workshops and/or lectures to enhance professional skills of self and others. The nominee must encourage personal and professional development of peers and/or subordinates. The nominee must inspire and demonstrate a passion for excellence in all aspects of work.

b. **Interpersonal Effectiveness.** The nominee must exhibit commendable interpersonal skills, and be respected by peers and members of the interdisciplinary health care team. The nominee must be sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities and of different backgrounds. The nominee must independently and continually demonstrate exceptional skill in effectively communicating with management, multi-disciplinary staff, personnel, and veteran patients and their families. The nominee must collaborate with other disciplines, departments, and care lines to ensure the nutritional needs of veterans are served. The nominee, as a manager, must provide effective leadership and vision for subordinates.

c. **Customer Service.** The nominee must demonstrate a thorough understanding of the needs of internal and external customers. The nominee must model exemplary commitment to customer service, and effectively utilize customer feedback to identify systems barriers and areas for improvement. Establishes a customer oriented culture and there is evidence that the nominee has taken a proactive role in pursuing/ measuring and improving all aspects of customer satisfaction at his/her facility.

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d. **Flexibility and/or Adaptability.** The nominee must demonstrate flexibility and resiliency in an ever-changing work environment. The nominee must demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning as a tool for change.

e. **Creative Thinking.** The nominee must demonstrate an ability to generate new and innovative ideas for improving the quality of processes and systems to enhance the nutritional and/or food services provided to veterans. The nominee must encourage and support innovation from co-workers, and demonstrate appropriate risk-taking.

f. **Systems Thinking.** The nominee must demonstrate awareness of the impact of provision of nutrition services on interdisciplinary practice and work to remove barriers within the system that prevent or impede the successful provision of nutrition services. The nominee must have developed strategies for improving service delivery. Special consideration will be given to those nominees who have demonstrated improvements in recent VHA initiatives and strategic goals which have resulted in cost savings or significant innovation in the provision of nutrition and food services.

g. **Organizational Stewardship.** The nominee must promote a positive image of dietitians and the profession within the facility and the community, and demonstrate how the mission, vision and values of the organization allow for effective delivery of nutritional care and services. The nominee provides a clear vision of the future and leads the organization through necessary changes.

h. **Technical Skills.** The nominee must have demonstrated competence to a degree that is routinely above that expected of a fully competent dietitian, e.g., has authored or co-authored a published study, developed a new process with significant impact on quality of care or efficiency of work processes, significantly improved an existing program despite reductions in staff, demonstrated leadership in facility-wide committees/initiatives and/or maintained a high-degree of nutrition care. Any environment of care violations, as cited by internal and external examiners, are within regulatory limits.

4. NOMINATION PROCEDURES: Nominations may be made by the facility senior management or by the immediate supervisor. They must:

a. Include a narrative statement responding to the applicable criteria and be specific in describing the nominee's accomplishments.

b. Not exceed three pages.

c. Define acronyms the first time they are used, i.e., Nutrition and Food Service (NFS); Associate Director, Patient Care Services (AD for PCS), etc.

d. Be sent through the facility Director; endorsed by the respective Network Director; and forwarded to the Director, Nutrition and Food Services (111N), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20420 by July 15 of each year, for that year's awards selection process.

5. SELECTION PROCESS. An ad hoc selection committee will be established, including representatives from the Office of the Chief, Patient Care Services; the Office of the Director, Nutrition and Food Services; a nominee from Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management (10N) and a facility Director or Associate Director. The committee will be convened annually by the Under Secretary for Health. This committee is responsible for:

a. Reviewing all nominations received and making a final recommendation to the Under Secretary for Health; and

b. Recommending, at its discretion, appropriate recognition for finalists who were not chosen as the recipient of this award, such as letters congratulating them on their nominations.

NOTE: The Ad Hoc Selection Committee may select the award recipient via conference calls.

6. AWARD PRESENTATION: The presentation of an engraved plaque and an honorarium of \$2,000 will be made to the award recipient at a ceremony held at the Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo (FNCE) of the American Dietetic Association in October 2006. Thereafter, the Under Secretary for Health will present the plaque and honorarium to each award recipient at a ceremony in Washington, DC, as part of National Nutrition Month each March.

NOTE: The nominee's facility is responsible for all nominee expenses incurred, including the nominee's per diem and travel.

7. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITY: The Director of Nutrition and Food Service (111N) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be addressed to 202-273-8516.

8. RESCISSIONS: This VHA Notice expires May 31, 2010.

Jonathan B. Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP
Under Secretary for Health

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